

Prologue

Getting to Know the Bible

The Bible is a library of 66 books with different human authors, written from about 1850 BC until 90 AD. Christians believe God chose the people to write, and they wrote what he wanted. That is why the Bible is called the “Word of God.” The Bible has two “testaments” or promises. They tell about God and his promise to us.

The Old Testament Promise

5 books of the LAW tell of God’s people and give His rules for living.
13 books tell the HISTORY of the nation of Israel.
4 books of POETRY show us God in a personal way.
17 books of PROPHECY tell what God is doing and plans to do.

The first words in the Bible are, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”¹ On the earth, God made the first man, Adam, from “the dust of the earth.” He created a woman, Eve, to be with the man. God made them “in his image.”² They were like God: they could live forever and they could talk with God. However, they could choose to do good or evil. They walked with God in the garden, and he gave them everything they needed,

but they chose to disobey God. This is called sin.

They wanted to be wise, but instead, they brought evil inside them for the first time. Instead of walking with God, they hid from him. Instead of living forever, they would have to die. God gave them a choice, but we all have to live with the consequences of their choice. We all have to die; only our spirits live forever. The Old Testament starts here. It tells how God loved the people he made,

but the people sinned.

¹ Genesis 1:1

² An image is something that is “like” the real thing. God does not have a body and He does not want people to make images of him from wood and stone. However, God says that we are images of him. This is why every human life is valuable.

God gave the people many opportunities to come back to him. God taught them to sacrifice, or kill, an animal to show they were sorry. The animal was a symbol: it died instead of the people. God found a faithful man, Abram (later named Abraham), and promised him that his descendents³ would become a great nation. They became the nation of Israel. God chose this man, and this nation, the Hebrews (now called Jews), so all nations could learn about the One, True, Living God,

but the people sinned again.

When the Hebrew people were slaves in Egypt, God rescued them and gave his Law to their leader, Moses. Now the people had rules to follow so they could do what was right,

but the people did not obey the Law.

God spoke through his messengers, the prophets, “Turn away from sin;⁴ turn back to God.” If they turned back to God he forgave⁵ them and rescued them. But he had to rescue them again and again,

and the people killed the prophets.

God promised to send a Savior,⁶ the Messiah,⁷ one who would rescue them and be their king forever. He made this plan from the beginning because he loved the people he created – not just the Jews, but people from all nations. The Jews were waiting and watching for the Messiah to come. At the time of Jesus’ birth, they had been waiting a long time. Israel was ruled by the Roman Empire. The Jews had a king,⁸ but he was a friend of the Romans and not a man of God. They wanted God’s Messiah to come and rescue them from the Romans! Finally the time came, but the Messiah was different than what they expected.

³ Your descendents are your children, grandchildren, and all future generations of their children.

⁴ Sin is not just robbery or murder. Sin is disobeying and dishonoring God. Sin breaks our relationship with the God who made us.

⁵ To forgive is to let go of or to forget about a wrong that someone did to us. When God forgives us, he takes away our bad record of sins against him. When we forgive others, we cannot take away their bad record, but we can let go and forget all about it.

⁶ A Savior is someone who saves or rescues people.

⁷ Messiah means “the Anointed One.” Kings and priests were anointed with oil on their heads to set them apart for their special service. The Old Testament says that THE Anointed One is coming. In Greek the word is “Christ.”

⁸ Herod ruled the Jewish State from 39-4 BC. He was called a king, but he was under Roman rule.

The Promise and The New Testament

God's promise came true. God made a way for people to know him personally like the first people knew him before they sinned. When Jesus was born, an angel announced, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."⁹ Jesus did not come to rescue the Jews from the Romans; he came to bring all nations back to God, to bring them back to life. This is the story of the New Testament.

There are 4 books called GOSPELS

There is 1 book called ACTS of the APOSTLES.

There are 21 LETTERS to the first churches.

There is 1 book of PROPHECY.

GOSPEL means "good news." The gospels are four ancient biographies of Jesus. They are personal and eyewitness accounts with different authors.¹⁰ You can read about Jesus' teachings, healings, and private conversations. You will learn that Jesus was killed because he claimed to be the Son of God. However, Jesus showed that his claims were true when he came back to life again three days later.¹¹ "Repent," Jesus said, "and believe the good news!" Mark 1:15

ACTS of the APOSTLES tells the history of the first thirty years of the Christian church. When Jesus came to earth, he was "God With Us."¹² After Jesus returned to the Father, he sent the Holy Spirit who is "God In Us." The Holy Spirit shows us more about God and continues the work of Jesus through Christians. This book tells how Jesus' disciples became the powerful and loving leaders of the church.

The twelve disciples and other leaders, especially a man named Paul, started new churches all around the Roman Empire. They could not visit the churches very often so they wrote LETTERS to them. Now these letters teach all Christians how to follow Jesus.

REVELATION is the final book. A revelation is an "opening up" of something that was closed or hidden. Jesus revealed the future to the apostle John. John "saw" Jesus returning to earth as King and Judge. The world that we know will end, but God will be King forever. If you know Jesus, you will live with him forever. If not, your own sins will keep you away.

⁹ Luke 2:10 "Christ" is Greek for the Hebrew word, "Messiah." You will see both words in this gospel.

¹⁰ Matthew and John were disciples of Jesus, Mark and Luke were close friends of his disciples. They recorded the eyewitness accounts of people who walked with Jesus.

¹¹ Coming back from the dead is called a "resurrection." Only Jesus has come back from the dead on his own power. The Christian faith is based on this historical truth.

¹² Matthew 1:23

The Bible as History

Much of the Bible is written as history.¹³ Archeologists¹⁴ have found cities, lakes, streets, and names of rulers mentioned in the Bible. The Bible was copied very carefully over the years, and we have many complete copies. Historians have found books and pieces of the Old Testament that are from the time of Jesus¹⁵ and part of the Gospel of John that is from before 135 AD.¹⁶ The words in these texts are very close to the Bible we now read. The New Testament was written with the help of the disciples and other eyewitnesses.¹⁷ It was written while many of these people were still alive.¹⁸ Furthermore, Jewish and Roman historians who lived at the same time wrote about Jesus and the first Christians.¹⁹ You can trust the Bible to be an historical text.

The original languages of the Bible are Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The three English translations used in this workbook are the *New International Version* (NIV),²⁰ the *Good News Bible* (GNB),²¹ and the *English Standard Version* (ESV).²²

As you explore the Bible, you will be amazed that an ancient text can know you so well. You will see yourself in the characters and hear your story in the stories that are told. If you listen, you will hear the Author speak directly to you.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword...it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. NIV

¹³ The information in this paragraph is from the *NIV Bible Dictionary* and the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

¹⁴ Archeologists are scientists who dig in the ground to study old cities and materials.

¹⁵ These are called the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were discovered in 1947 and include the book of Isaiah and other texts. They are from the time of Jesus.

¹⁶ It is called the Rylands Fragment. It was found in 1935. John's letters were written around 90 AD, so this is less than 45 years from that time.

¹⁷ Eyewitnesses are those who heard or saw something "with their own eyes."

¹⁸ They were written from around 55–95 AD.

¹⁹ Josephus, Pliny, and Tacitus.

²⁰ *New International Version* of the Bible is published by the International Bible Society, 1982.

²¹ The latest edition of the *Good News Bible: Today's English Version* is published by the American Bible Society, 1992.

²² *The English Standard Version* is published by Good News Publishers, Crossway Bibles, 2001.